



The New Mayor
Based on G.H. Broadhurst's Successful Play

THE MAN OF THE HOUR

BY
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GEORGE H. BROADHURST

SCENES OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER I.—At the suburban home of Charles Wright, "high financier," he and his broker, Gibbs, hatch up a scheme to corner high street railway stock. They rely upon support of Dick Horrigan, boss of the borough city, who is coming to displace Alderman Phelan, the thorn in Horrigan's side, whom Wainwright is anxious to replace, also coming. Among the members Wainwright's household are his niece and nephew, Dallas and Perry Wainwright, and his secretary, Thompson, a secretive young man in the financier has implicit confidence. Newman, a neighbor of Wainwright, whose continuance in office depends upon Horrigan's favor, requests Wainwright's intervention with the boss. Another visitor to the night is Alwyn Bennett, in love with a girl who is calling to ask her about her engagement to Gibbs. Perry is in love with Cynthia Garrison, also a neighbor. Cynthia is the daughter of a bank president who years before the opening of the story was seduced by the dealings of an unnamed dishonest man and shot himself. His son thereupon married Mrs. Bennett, congratulating her upon the immaculate record of her son's father. Dallas refuses to marry Alwyn because he does something worthy of his family education. Phelan and Horrigan face each other. III—Phelan defies Horrigan. Judge is turned down by the boss, but at night's request Horrigan agrees to reconsider his case. Horrigan becomes suspicious of you, but Wainwright scoffs at the idea. Phelan and Wainwright make a corrupt deal by the former, for a big consideration, is to be from the board of aldermen a franchise for the Borough Street railway. Phelan is worried by the reform movement and his power at the coming election and about for a candidate for mayor with a record. He hits upon Bennett, who has some slight political experience. The latter, who warns Horrigan, that if elected, he is absolutely honest and independent.

What a queer chap he is!" mused Perry, as Phelan hastened away on his mission. "If I could take a six months' course in slang and hot air from that man I'd be able to sew buttons on the whole English language. I don't think you need very much more," observed Dallas. "But it was of Mr. Phelan to look after us. I am he."

"Because he's standing by Bennett in this fight?"

"Bennett is nothing to me," Perry asked Perry in innocent tone. "Then I wasted a lot of good little money cabling to you about campaign when you were across the big wash last summer. For a who was 'nothing' to you you took large swads of intelligent insult. Look here, little girl, he went as flippantly, 'what's the matter?' anything?"

"She broke in, with a miserable cry. 'Nothing's the matter. I'm perfectly happy. Why shouldn't I? An engaged girl is always—'

"An engaged girl?" she shouted in glee. "You don't mean to say you and Alwyn?"

"Of course not. I am engaged to Gibbs."

"Good Lord!" gasped the lad in consternation. "If that's meant for a joke, it's the funniest ever! Did you mean a joke, Perry, and it's very of you to talk so. I am engaged to Gibbs, and—"

"But—how—when did the atrocity take place, and—"

"I became engaged to him the night after the administration ball. I didn't tell you yet, because I knew you wouldn't like him. I'm—I'm—"

"You're happy?"

"Certainly I am!" she retorted demurely. "So happy that I—"

"That you are having a fight to keep that crying this blessed minute!" he cried. "Say, Dallas, it breaks me up to have you so miserable. I don't want a lot of you. More'n of Cynthia. And I want BR—"

The young mayor came in, talking to the alderman as he came.

"This room's disengaged," he was saying. "I'll write it here and give it to—oh, I beg your pardon," he broke off, recognizing Dallas and Perry. "I didn't know."

"I've got two good seats for you," announced Phelan. "Right where you can see an' hear the whole shootin' match. An' I guess before the meetin's over you'll be able to get as interestin' as a double 'Uncle Tom' show in a tent. I'll show you the way as soon as you're ready. There's no rush. Things ain't begun to sizzle up yet."

Bennett had crossed to where Dallas stood irresolute and, under cover of Phelan's talk with Perry, said to her, with a certain unconscious stiffness: "I fear I was too taken aback by your announcement the other evening to remember to congratulate you, but please believe me when I say I wish you every happiness in the new life you have chosen."

"Thank you very much," faltered Dallas.

There was an awkward pause; then she said:

"You came in here to write something. I'm afraid we are detaining you. You must be busy with your fight against the Borough bill. You are quite determined to continue it to the end?"

"To the bitter end!" he answered miserably. "Even though that end can hold nothing but bitterness for me."

The set anguish in his face moved Dallas more than she dared confess even to herself.

"I am sorry," she said softly.

"It is the course I have chosen," he answered, with a shrug. "And if it leads to eternal darkness instead of the sunlight I expected I must follow it none the less."

"That is sheer obstinacy," she cried, battling against her own heart's passionate plea. "You have laid out a plan to ruin Mr. Gibbs, to deprive Perry and me of my own fortune."

"To enrich myself by selling Borough stock short and then vetoing the bill so that the stock would collapse. You have done all this, and yet you talk of following your abominable course to the end!"

"Dallas," he said very quietly, "you don't understand, and you refused to trust me to explain, so I can say no more. But one day you may learn the cruel mistake you are making."

"Mistake?"

"I don't mean that you are mistaken in choosing Gibbs instead of me, but that you are wrong in your judgment of what I am doing. I hope you will understand some day. It will be too late to change anything then, but at least I shall be set right in your eyes. And that means more to me than you can ever know. Goodbye."

He left the room abruptly, and Dallas stared after him, her brain awash with conflicting thoughts.

"There's a man in ten million, miss," volunteered Phelan, breaking in on her reverie, "an' from the looks of that bran' new dinky, three-k spark on your finger I guess you're wise to the fact."

"I am engaged to Mr. Gibbs," replied Dallas coldly.

"What the—" gasped Phelan, checking himself just in time. "I'm sure sorry for you, miss," he went on, with a sincerity that precluded any offense. "For frien' Gibbs is going to have something so heavy fall on his bank roll by the time we're through with this Borough bill that he'll be able to use his wad for a book mark without crinklin' any of the leaves. Why, he'll!"

"Come, Perry," interrupted Dallas. "Shall we go to the meeting now?"

Confused, she turned to the door leading into Horrigan's room instead of that opening on the corridor and found herself face to face with her uncle, the boss and Gibbs.

"I beg your pardon," she began, surprised. "I didn't know."

"Dallas!" exclaimed Gibbs and Wainwright in the same breath. Horrigan scowled at the interruption as all three men rose to their feet.

"What brings you to a place like this?" asked Wainwright in displeasure.

"Perry and I," indicating her brother, who had followed her into the room, "are going to attend the meeting of the board of aldermen."

"But," protested her uncle disapprovingly, "it is hardly the sort of—"

"My fortune and Perry's and that of the man I am to marry are all bound up in the Borough bill," she answered fearlessly. "I have a right to be present when that bill's fate is decided."

"Good nerve!" applauded Horrigan. "You're a thoroughbred. If there were more women like you—"

"Mr. Horrigan," reported Williams, hurrying in from an antechamber, "the police have come, and—"

"All right," answered the boss. "Give the sergeant his orders."

"I—I hardly like the responsibility," muttered Williams, "and—"

"But you'll take it, I'm backing you. By the way, get seats for Miss Wainwright and her brother. Get them close to the anteroom door, so if there's a row she can come back here. If there are no vacant seats there, clear a couple of people out and make place for—"

"But we have seats," protested Dallas as Williams sped on his errand. "Alderman Phelan—"

"Alderman Phelan will have trouble finding a seat in this city when I'm done with him," snarled Horrigan. "Better take the seats I offer, Miss Wainwright. They're safer."

"But," protested Wainwright, "if there's to be any danger she mustn't be there. I can't have—"

"I will be on hand to help her if there is," Gibbs answered him.

"H'm!" grunted Horrigan in somewhat uncomplimentary doubt.

"I will, too!" spoke up Perry. Horrigan nodded approval.

"You'll be all right then," said he. "And now—"

"You spoke of the police being in the aldermanic chamber," said Dallas. "What for?"

"To check any trouble the gallery may make," answered Horrigan. "This man Bennett's stirred the people up with a lot of his anarchistic reform ideas till they're crazy. Some one's liable to get a broken skull, and then Bennett will have himself to thank. Maybe when the police have hampered a little sense into folks' heads with their nightsticks, the victims will begin to understand just what sort of a man Alwyn Bennett is. Remember now, Gibbs, and you, too, young Wainwright, if there's any sign of a row bring Miss Wainwright back here at once."

"All right," agreed Perry, a little rueful at the prospect of missing a free fight. "Let's go in there now. I've never been to an aldermen's meeting before, but I ran up against a car strike riot once, so I guess I'm on to most of the subtle rules of elegance that govern such shows. Come on, people, if you're coming."

"Your niece is a thoroughbred," repeated Horrigan, with rare approbation, as the anteroom door closed behind Dallas and her two escorts. "So she's to marry Gibbs, is she? I'm sorry for them both."

"Why?" asked Wainwright sharply.

"Because it won't take her a year to find out that he's a yellow cur. And when she does she'll either kick him out or lead him around on a chain. Now, the fellow a girl of that sort ought to have married is Bennett. He's an obstinate fool, but he's a man. I thought you said once he was stuck on her."

"He was. He still is."

"And she took Gibbs instead?" cried Horrigan, a world of incredulity in his rough voice. "Women are a queer lot! Why'd she shake Bennett, if it is a fair question?"

"I let her see Gibbs was a heroic martyr," said Wainwright, with quiet significance, "and that Bennett was—"

"Oh, I see!" chuckled Horrigan. "Still, there might be something made out of Bennett's love for her even yet."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm not quite sure. I'll have to think it over."

CHAPTER XV.
WILLIAMS entered with Roberts in tow. The latter wore a haggard, troubled look, and his natural nervousness had visibly deepened, so much so that he had not even noted Phelan's appearance in the corridor as he passed into Horrigan's private room.

"Good evening, alderman," said Horrigan civilly.

"Good evening, sir," answered Roberts palpably ill at ease.

"I understand there's a full meeting today. Even Ellis came back from the south to be here. You're the only man missing."

"I couldn't get here sooner. I—"

"I see. That's all, Williams. You needn't wait. Roberts and I want a little talk before he goes in. Now, then," went on the boss, with a complete change of manner as Williams left the room, "what's the matter with you?"

"I—I can't—"

"Can't what? Speak out, man! Don't stand there and mumble at me!"

"I can't vote for the Borough franchise bill."

"Can't, hey?" roared Horrigan. "Why not?"

"Because—because—" faltered Roberts; then, with a rush of hysterical emotion that blotted out his fear, he cried:

"Have you heard what that man Bennett has done? He organized a voters' committee in my ward and sent them to ask me at my own house what I was going to do about that bill. They had been stirred up by Bennett till they looked on me as a crook and on the bill as a personal robbery. They told me if I voted for it they'd know I was a dirty thief and grafter and that they'd kick me out of the ward."

"Well, well!" rumbled Horrigan soothingly, as though trying to calm a fractious drunkard. "What do you care? When they've forgotten all about the bill you'll still have the dough, won't you? Folks won't ask 'How'd he get it?' All they'll care to know is 'Has he got it?'"

"That isn't all!" Roberts blundered on, scarcely heeding the interruption. "Bennett's next step was to organize a committee of voters' wives, and they came to see my wife this morning when I was out and told her they'd heard I was going to sell myself and vote for a dishonest bill. My wife—my wife thinks I'm the squarest, noblest, most earthy. Oh, you needn't sneer! Her trust! The girl with—"

me. She told the women I wouldn't stoop to any deed that wasn't honest, and they answered: 'Our husbands believe Mr. Roberts is a crook. If he is really honest he'll vote against that bill, as he did before.' Then on my way home this noon I met my little boy. He was crying. I asked him what the matter was. He said that some boys had told him I was a grafter. I tell you, his voice rising almost to a scream, 'Bennett's made my life a hell. I'm no crook. I'm honest and—'

"Sure you're honest!" Horrigan exclaimed, as though to a cross child. "Honest as the day! That's why you're voting for our bill. Because the crooked clauses have been cut out of it, and in its present form it's a benefit to the city."

"That isn't why I promised to vote for it," contradicted Roberts, with a despairing dash of courage. "It was because I—because—"

"Never mind why, then, but just go ahead and do it."

"I won't! I dare not!"

"You'll do it, I say!" stormed Horrigan. "You can't wince on me at this stage of the game. Those Sturtevant Trust company notes of yours were sent to you and—"

"And I won't take them!" declared Roberts, slamming two slips of paper down upon the table. "There! Take them back!"

"What do I want of them?" argued Horrigan craftily. "They belong to you."

"They don't. I won't keep them."

"You'll have to. I keep you to your promise."

"What promise?" asked a voice behind them.

Bennett, hastily summoned by Phelan, had entered the room unobserved by either of the excited men.

"What promise?" he asked again. "A promise to—"

"What are you doing here?" bellowed Horrigan in fury. "You called me down once for coming into your private office without knocking. What do you mean by coming into mine?"

"Yours?" queried Alwyn. "I had an idea it was the city's. The time is past when the words 'Horrigan' and 'city' meant the same thing. Well, Roberts, how are you going to vote? I want to believe you honest, and—"

"Why, what's all this?" his eyes falling on the forgotten notes on the table.

"Nothing of yours!" shouted Horrigan, making a futile, furious grab for the documents which Alwyn was picking up. "Drop them! Drop them. I say, or you'll—"

retorted Horrigan, "and if you dare read them!"

"I've already read them. Roberts," he added in a kinder voice, turning to the shaking alderman, "these were to have been your bribe, weren't they, for voting for the Borough bill?"

His quietly compelling tone and glance forced from Roberts a frightened "Yes" before Horrigan could interfere.

"I thought so. Be quiet, Horrigan," he commanded as the infuriated boss sought to speak through his choking wrath. "This is between Roberts and me. Now, then—"

"I returned the notes to him!" pleaded Roberts in panic. "Honestly, I did! Just before you came in. I could have kept them, and he couldn't have prevented me even if I voted against the bill. But I'm square and—"

"You are square!" affirmed Bennett, gripping the alderman's cold, moist hand in friendly reassurance. "I knew all along you were honest at heart. Horrigan wanted to bribe you, and you wouldn't be bribed. Now, I want you to go into the council room and vote as your manhood tells you to."

Roberts, comforted, yet still trembling, obeyed, not venturing a second look at Horrigan.

"Now, my friend," said Bennett pleasantly when he and the boss were alone together, "what are you going to do about it? It seems to me your game is up."

"I want those notes!" panted Horrigan, finding coherent speech with an effort through his red mist of rage.

"Why? They're not yours. They aren't made over to you, and there is no cancellation stamp on them. They are the property of the Sturtevant Trust company, and I'll send them back there tomorrow—after I've had them photographed."

"You'll give them to me," shouted Horrigan, his mighty body vibrating with fury, "or you'll never leave this room alive!"

"You're a fool, Horrigan," remarked Bennett, with condescending calm, "for you don't even know the right man to bully!"

He gazed unflinchingly into the maddened little eyes of the boss, and so for a moment they stood—patrician and proletarian—in the world old struggle of the two supremacies.

Horrigan's face was scarlet, distorted, murderous; Bennett's pale, cold, deadly in its repose.

And then, waging the battle of wills, both men standing motionless, tense, vibrant with dynamic force.

Slowly, little by little, Horrigan's eyes dropped. He moved awkwardly to one side from his position in front of the door and Bennett, without so much as a backward look, passed out.

The boss, like a man in a daze, sank heavily into a chair and gazed straight ahead of him, his usually red face gray and pasty.

But he was not to enjoy even the scant boon of solitude. From the anteroom Gibbs strolled in.

"They're going over some unimportant preliminary business," remarked the broker, "so I came out for a breath of fresh air. How are things going?"

"We're beat," grunted Horrigan, not looking up.

"Beat?" screamed Gibbs, ashen and inert at the news. "You don't mean it! You can't mean it! Great heaven!"

The sight of the other's cowardly emotion seemed to rouse Horrigan from his apathy.

"If I can stand it, you can!" he snarled. "You only lose your percentage on the deal, while I—"

"A percentage?" echoed Gibbs, too panic stricken to heed his own indiscretion. "Every cent I had in the world! I!"

He checked himself an instant too late.

"So?" drawled Horrigan, his keen little eyes searing the other with boundless contempt. "So it was you who were secretly buying up the stock and taling in on to our game, hey?"

"I'm ruined! Broke! And—"

"And you've got it coming to you, you whining traitor! The man who goes back on his partners deserves all the kicking he gets."

"I—I didn't mean any harm!" mumbled the crushed Gibbs. "It couldn't hurt you people to have me buy Borough stock for myself, and I'd have cleared up a million and more. Oh, don't glower like that, Horrigan, but try to think out some way of—"

"Of what, you cur?"

"Isn't there any way even now to make Bennett let up on his fight?"

(Continued Next Week)

The British court is called the court of St. James because St. James' palace, London, is its official headquarters.